

THIS MONTH: GEARING FOR PROFIT

SETTING UP and running your private practice is the equivalent to setting up a new small business. Like all enterprises, you are there to make a profit and there are certain criteria to agree and implement before commencing, writes *Alison Ryan*.

First of all, think about your front-line response. This is where you make that crucial first impression. For instance, do you want all your telephone calls answered personally or are you happy to use voicemails? This may depend on your own time and also how busy your practice tends to be.

Undoubtedly, many people do value the personal touch. However, consider whether you actually require every patient to be greeted by your practice manager or whether you would rather meet them yourself.

Now you should consider, define and agree your level of service quality.

Once this is established, remember to clearly communicate your service standards with your practice manager. There is no point setting high standards that your team isn't aware of.

Also, agree on ways of measuring the service you deliver by considering patient surveys, the number of new referrals, the attendance rate and, hopefully, your increased revenues.

Once up and running, you need to ensure that you have robust and efficient processes in place to help allow for consistency of service and business continuity.

Think about who will cover during an unexpected absence, such as maternity leave and long-term sickness. With good, solid proc-

esses in place, your practice will continue without a problem.

Next, it is important to identify any weaknesses in your practice. For example, is your practice manager coping with the amount of letters you produce and, equally importantly, are they being sent out in a timely manner? Might you need to invest in new software?

The healthcare industry is an ever-changing one, but you can control your own high standards. Consider all of the options available for practice management; there are certainly plenty out there.

Alison Ryan is client relationship manager at private practice management specialist PHF. Phone 0870 190 9391 or view the website www.phf.uk.com